

## BOOK REVIEW:

### *Counselling in the Workplace: The Facts A Systematic Study of the Research Evidence*

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It's official – stress at work can affect your mental health. The impacts of work stress will come as no surprise to counsellors who deal with its fallout on a regular basis. In New Zealand, recent amendments to the Health and Safety in Employment Act should give some regulatory teeth and require employers to take responsibility for the effective management of workplace stress and fatigue.

This recent report into the scope and focus of workplace counselling makes timely and fascinating reading. It is a systematic and comprehensive report of all English-language studies, both published and unpublished, spanning the period between 1954 and 2000 and reflecting the experiences of more than 10,000 clients who have made use of work-related counselling services.

For employers, policy advisors in Occupational Safety and Health and human resource consultants seeking

guidelines on more effective management of work stress issues, this report gives some clear messages. It concludes, amongst other things, that:

- **the majority (over 90%) of employees who make use of workplace counselling are highly satisfied with the service they have received, would use it again if necessary, and would recommend it to colleagues;**
- **people who make use of workplace counselling typically report high levels of psychological distress, equivalent to that found in out-patient psychiatric populations;**
- **counselling interventions are generally effective in alleviating symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression.** Two-thirds of studies have shown that, following counselling, levels of work-related symptoms and stress return to the 'normal' range for more than 50% of clients;

- counselling interventions have been found, in the majority of studies which have examined this factor, to **reduce sickness absence rates in clients by 25-50%**;
- counselling interventions have a lesser, but still significant, **positive impact on job commitment, work functioning, job satisfaction, and substance misuse**;
- **there is no evidence that any one approach to counselling is more effective than any other in this field.** Positive results have been found using a variety of models of counselling, including cognitive-behavioural, psychodynamic, person-centred, rational emotive and solution focused.

The report is written in a concise and user-friendly format with research findings succinctly summarised under specific headings. These cover studies on areas such as outcome studies (does it

work?); the economic costs and benefits; employee attitudes and utilisation (who uses it) and further aspects such as process issues (how it works); counsellor characteristics and help-seeking behaviours (how clients choose).

The final two sections focus on research issues in workplace counselling – methodological issues and directions for future research.

For counsellors in New Zealand who are involved with the EAP (Employee Assistance Programme) or who provide specific workplace counselling, these conclusions will give a research base for promoting their work. Send a copy to your boss, human resource manager or local politician!

Copies of the report can be ordered from the Book Orders Department at the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 1 Regent Place, Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 2PJ, England, or [bacp@bacp.co.uk](mailto:bacp@bacp.co.uk).